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Swimming against the tide: a study of a neighbourhood trying to rediscover its ‘reason for being’– the case of South Bank, Redcar and Cleveland

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ABSTRACT

Many of the programmes and initiatives to regenerate deprived neighbourhoods appear to have had limited lasting impact. It has been argued that one reason for this is that we still have little real understanding of the nature and scale of the problems some communities face (Bernt, 2009). This paper attempts to add to our knowledge through close study of an area with multiple problems and a history of failed regeneration attempts. An in-depth case study undertaken to explore the current situation and future prospects of South Bank, a small neighbourhood in the North East of England, highlights transferable knowledge which may be applied to other regeneration areas.

The analysis considers the nature and consequences of industrial decline; entrenched deprivation; the stigmatization of communities; the value of community consultation and the potential impact of retail-led regeneration. We question whether negative stigma attached to places can be changed and we ask what the future may hold for deprived communities now that public sector funding has largely dried up, and we consider an alternative approach: the potential impacts of private sector retail-led regeneration in the absence of public sector funding.

Keywords: urban regeneration, deprived areas, managed decline, community consultation, retail-led regeneration, eco-homes

INTRODUCTION

‘If the people of South Bank could hear me say this they would kill me – but there is almost no need for South Bank now, the industry has moved on’. (Stakeholder interview, 2010)

‘You have to question whether parts of South Bank have a future. At the moment it is death by a thousand cuts’. (Stakeholder interview, 2010)

This is the story of a deprived area struggling to secure a viable future. Like so many other places, South Bank, in Teesside, North East England, has been hard hit by long term economic decline. Repeated attempts have been made to regenerate the area, with limited success. The future of South Bank hangs in the balance but it is not yet a lost cause. New opportunities are coming to the surrounding area and there is now a little more optimism; however, the wider economic context is problematic and could easily undermine regeneration efforts.

The story of South Bank is in many ways typical, and it is also revealing. It demonstrates the sheer difficulty of trying to tackle decline and intervene—with limited resources, of course—in ways that will bring about positive and lasting change. This account shows that there are no easy solutions to the problems experienced and endured by local communities in a place like South Bank. Both policy makers and residents face difficult dilemmas and are having to make hard choices. The central

overriding themes of this story are frustration, confusion and intractable problems. Residents have become increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of regeneration and the lack of promised new housing development, and policymakers are frustrated at the systemic nature of the social problems, the lack of funding to do a comprehensive job, and the constantly changing policy landscape. A pragmatic compromise needs to be reached between the normative dimension of what 'should be done' to change the trajectory of the area and, on a more practical level, 'what 'can be done', within the parameters of budgetary and moral constraints, to improve the area or, perhaps more realistically, to stem the tide of decline.

TRAJECTORIES OF DEPRIVED AREAS: TERMINAL DECLINE, OR RISE AND FALL?

The North East of England has experienced industrial decline over many years (Robinson, 2002; Robinson et al., 2007). The Teesside conurbation, in the southern part of the region, still has some industry, but manufacturing employs far fewer people than in the past. Robinson et al (2007:9) state the sobering reality that, 'there are now more people working in shops than factories in the North East'. South Bank, close to the River Tees and just east of Middlesbrough, is one of the places that have suffered most from the consequences of economic change, because of its former dependence on heavy industries, particularly steel, shipbuilding and chemicals.

South Bank benefitted little from some of the major area-based regeneration schemes of the New Labour era. New Deal for Communities (NDC) funding was allocated to West Middlesbrough; Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder funding was granted to Stockton-on-Tees and no deprived neighbourhoods within Teesside were amongst the original nine Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder areas announced in 2002.¹ Even in more prosperous economic times at the start of the millennium, competition for regeneration funding was fierce within the Tees Valley sub-region. Robinson et al's (2007:6) review of the North East notes that during the first ten years of New Labour rule parts of the North East prospered but, 'there are individuals and communities which have been left behind, perhaps more marginalised than ever in this more prosperous North East'.

¹ Subsequently in 2006 Teesside (Tees Valley Living) received a limited amount of HMR funding, the funds were spread thinly between several areas in Tees Valley. South Bank ultimately received a small amount which was used to demolish five hundred properties.

South Bank is a prime example of a marginalised community and the situation it faces now is not just difficult but may even threaten its survival. According to the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation (Communities and Local Government, 2011), three of the four Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) which make up South Bank ward are in the most deprived decile nationally. Two of these are among the 100 most deprived SOAs (ranking at 94th and 74th respectively). A local authority report expressed the gravity of the situation in South Bank in stark terms:

‘The decline...of the industries that provided jobs for local residents means that there is no longer any economic justification for the existence of these communities. The challenge which they...face is to determine a new justification for their existence’.

(Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, 2001, p5)

The prospects for such areas are disputed. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council has been committed to regenerating the area and finding a ‘new justification’ for its existence for the last two decades. But here, as elsewhere, regeneration has not been enough. Perhaps the problems are too great. Indeed, some argue that such areas are trapped in a downward spiral, with poverty and its associated problems becoming increasingly entrenched and intractable:

‘Entrenched deprivation is defined as persistent and profound poverty and disadvantage that is characterised by multiple complex problems (such as generational worklessness, very low income, low educational achievement, chronic health problems) and is resistant to interventions to improve quality of life for people.’

(Hothi and Woodcraft, 2010: p11)

Recent research by IPPR North has shown that areas like South Bank did not show much improvement even when the economic context was more favourable. People claiming welfare benefits became more segregated and were increasingly concentrated in certain neighbourhoods during the recent years of economic growth (Schmuecker and Viitanen, 2011). The process of creating highly localised deprivation has been largely driven by housing market forces (North et al, 2006), but stigma

is also a factor. Atkinson and Kintrea (2001) report that the concentration of deprivation in neighbourhoods intensifies disadvantage for individuals living in those neighbourhoods, most notably through the perceived reputation of the area. Being labelled as a 'deprived area' can prove increasingly 'toxic' and perceptions may only be altered across generations rather than over 'mere' decades. Cameron (2003:2376) observes,

'...even existing stocks of good housing are 'written-off' as acceptable places to live as a result of the stigmatisation and social exclusion of people and neighbourhoods'.

The negative stereotypes that are associated with coming from a 'deprived area' can have a real impact on some residents' aspirations, confidence and chances of securing employment. Our research found that a high percentage of young people from South Bank preferred to mix with people from their immediate locality and were very apprehensive about having contact with young people from other communities, fearing that they would be judged negatively because they were 'South Bankers'.

The influential think-tank Policy Exchange (2008:62) is particularly pessimistic about places that, they say, are now 'in the wrong place at the wrong time' and argue that some old industrial areas should be taken off the 'life support systems' that have sustained them over the last three decades:

'..... if we are honest about the constraints and realistic about the opportunities then we can make progress. We need to accept above all that we cannot guarantee to regenerate every town and every city in Britain that has fallen behind.'

(Policy Exchange, 2008: p5)

Others are more hopeful and less dismissive of the achievements of regeneration, suggesting that today's industrial ruins may bounce back when the time is right:

'Each spatio-temporal moment of industrial ruination is situated somewhere along a continuum between creation and destruction, fixity and motion, expansion and

contraction. Over time, landscapes of industrial ruination will become landscapes of regeneration, reuse, demolition or abandonment all over again’.

(Mah, 2010: p400)

For South Bank, the questions are: will the deep scars of ‘industrial ruination’ heal, and *can* the area become a viable ‘landscape of reuse’?

MANAGING DECLINE, PROMOTING REGENERATION

We have been looking at the situation in South Bank in order to support local regeneration efforts. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council commissioned us to undertake a scoping exercise on the feasibility of setting up a 25 year longitudinal assessment of the impact of planned large scale neighbourhood regeneration in the area. The Council views this as a valuable opportunity to gather evidence on how the regeneration programme will affect the lives and opportunities of local residents over the long term.

A key part of the work was the compilation of a detailed baseline to capture the current position of the study area. A series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with local stakeholders, residents, and community activists to enrich the baseline data and provide a deeper contextualisation of the area. This qualitative approach mirrors the agency-centred approach of Batty and Cole (2010), for example, which attempted to build an understanding of change within neighbourhoods from the perspectives of residents.

An initial review of South Bank’s history highlighted the fact that the area had experienced boom as well as bust during the twentieth century. At its most prosperous, it had a vibrant ‘heart’ with its own weekly market, diverse shopping areas and a lively social scene. However, the decline of local industries, technological change and the loss of local employment opportunities led to the seemingly inexorable decline of the area. The area has now had considerable problems for a number of decades; as early as 1962, the former Eston Urban District Council expressed concern about

'disturbing' pockets of unemployment in South Bank and nearby Grangetown (Phillimore and Moffatt, 1999).

Subsequent regeneration schemes have included physical improvements, selective demolition in areas where anti-social behaviour was concentrated, refurbishment of properties and street improvements. Single Regeneration Budget Round 2 (SRB2) funding of around £17.5 million was granted, followed by Round 5 funding of £7 million (shared with a neighbouring area) for housing improvements and community development. While the SRB2 programme aimed to take an holistic approach to regeneration, extensive community consultations revealed that housing was a key priority for local people, and £2 million was ultimately allocated to demolitions, refurbishment and street improvements. Community safety and education projects were also developed, and employment initiatives included a successful Job Connect scheme, which offered local employers training and equipment subsidies to encourage them to employ local people. However, it was unclear what impacts there had been on the long term unemployed and people difficult to place in employment. Similarly with SRB5 funding, substantial monies were re-allocated from economic regeneration activity towards housing projects.

The SRB programmes did lead to a number of positive outcomes, including excellent literacy training and well-equipped schools, unemployment being halved and two new companies moving into the area, reduced housing voids, and lowered crime rates. However, a 2001 position statement following these SRB initiatives reported that there were still numerous problems in the area, including social exclusion, low housing demand, a falling population, low incomes, and 'a degree of apathy within the community' (Redcar and Cleveland Council, 2001, p8). The report described what were regarded as the two main types of South Bank residents, '...those who have been there all their lives and don't want to or can't afford to move; and young people who move into the area because they cannot afford anywhere else' (Redcar and Cleveland Council, 2001, p5).

Over the past decade, three successive plans for the area's future have been developed: a Housing Renewal Plan (Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners, 2004), a Sustainable Communities Plan (DTZ Pidea Consulting, 2005) and Greater Eston Strategic Master Plan (GVA Grimley, 2008). A significant

amount of community consultation activity has taken place during the formulation of these plans. Based on their recommendations, and with funding from a variety of sources, including the Borough Council, there has been widespread demolition of the 'street houses' (terraced houses), without replacement.

The Greater Eston Delivery Plan does include plans to retain and improve elements of the existing South Bank community, but that is not its central focus. A new development site, Low Grange Farm, has been earmarked for the provision of around 1000 new homes over the next few years. The site is around three quarters of a mile from the traditional heart of the South Bank neighbourhood. Some longstanding residents of South Bank feel the new development is a cynical attempt to sideline the old South Bank and relocate parts of the community to the new development site at Low Grange.

South Bank, like many deprived communities in England, appears to be approaching a pivotal point in its history. Can it create a new future for the twenty first century and beyond, or will it lapse into palliative care and be allowed to gradually expire? In 2010, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) requested that a full economic appraisal of regeneration plans for South Bank be carried out to assess funding options for further action. At the time of writing, consultants are in the process of finalising this appraisal; however, early signs suggest that there will be a significant shortfall – in the region of £25 million - in funding for the existing regeneration plans. However, elements of the Greater Eston Strategic Master Plan that have already received funding are currently progressing.

HOUSING MARKET FAILURE

Low demand for terraced properties is a big problem in South Bank. By around 2000, house prices had fallen to an all-time low of £3,000, with the result that many properties were bought by speculative investors for private rental. Although this has not been substantiated, interviewees thought that problems relating to a number of private sector tenants had made up a high proportion of incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour in South Bank.

Housing statistics show that 75% of South Bank's housing stock is in the lowest Council Tax Band (A); house prices have stayed relatively low (the median price was £42,500 in 2009) and tenants' surveys of social housing indicate low levels of satisfaction on local estates. Void properties are seen as a particular problem, with empty houses being described by one interviewee as 'spreading like a cancer'. There has been a widespread programme of demolition in the area in an attempt to tackle housing market failure, but the tactic of strategic demolition was deemed by many to have been unsuccessful.

'At the time it was as though, if a street was derelict, it was best getting it down, but that just spread and spread and spread.'

(Resident, 2010)

A number of residents were emphatic that the only answer now was to invest in the area by refurbishing existing housing and building new developments. But there is doubt about whether that would actually work. A housing officer felt that:

'The older 'street' housing area hasn't got a sustainable future because of the tenure mix and the make-up of the community. The older owner-occupiers who were keeping the place together are drifting off or dying'.

(Stakeholder, 2010)

Most local residents believed that South Bank had a bad reputation locally, associated with crime, drugs, violence and anti-social behaviour.

'There is a stigma; when people ask me where I live and I say South Bank, they are shocked, the usual response is 'it's rough round there and there's loads of rogues'.

(Resident, 2010)

Statistics show that, regrettably, this reputation is not without foundation. South Bank *does* have a very high level of crime: in 2008/09, 196 offences were notified to the police per 1000 population, compared with 83.4 per 1000 in Redcar and Cleveland as a whole.

Figure 1: Boarded up housing in South Bank, 2011



(C) Author, David McGuinness

Despite its problems and reputation, many people feel a strong attachment to South Bank. Records from the local Housing Renewal Team, which was responsible for relocating residents in order to make way for demolitions, demonstrate that attachment. Out of 116 relocated households, the majority (61) chose to move to another property in South Bank, while 35 moved short distances to other parts of Greater Eston, and 20 were relocated further afield. This shows that many residents were committed to remaining in South Bank; interviews with other residents indicated that the reasons for this included family living locally, 'good neighbours' and community spirit, as well as a simple feeling of 'belonging' to the area:

'I love South Bank, to me it is home. I have been all round the world and worked abroad but I still yearn to come home.'

(Resident, 2010)

However, contradictory evidence exists which suggest residents may change their views if they make the leap and move from South Bank to a neighbouring community. The local authority Housing Renewal Team recently undertook exit surveys with relocated householders who were relocated outside the existing South Bank community, to find out how they viewed the experience. 33 respondents who were relocated between 2004 and 2010 were asked about how their circumstances had changed as a result of moving and how they viewed life in the street houses of South Bank in retrospect. Overwhelmingly, respondents said they were happy to have left the area for what they considered to be a better standard of housing (cited by 12 people) in better areas (6 people), and improved quality of life (21 people). Only two people expressed sadness about leaving.

CONSULTATION AS EMPOWERMENT

Fuller and Geddes (2008:262) state that, 'New Labour has gone further than previous governments in introducing the discourse of "community" into the urban state'. The level of consultation activity in South Bank which has accompanied the various regeneration initiatives is a very contentious issue within the community. There has been an awful lot of consultation and there are visible signs of consultation fatigue among residents. It is debatable whether this increased level of consultation has actually been beneficial to the communities it was designed to empower. In South Bank many members of the community feel their views have not been properly integrated into regeneration plans, and, conversely, some policy makers feel that residents' expectations have been simply unrealistic. One resident summed up the mood,

"...there have been lots of big promises over the last 10 years, which haven't been fulfilled.

Why promise something you can't deliver?" (Resident, 2010)

As impartial observers to the process we must question in this instance the motives of the centrally-driven 'empowerment agenda': was it driven by a genuine desire to consult and empower, or as has been suggested by Fuller and Geddes (2008), a tick box control mechanism to enmesh the

communities into a largely preordained state driven neo-liberal governance process? Somerville (2011:91) observes that successive governments have offered '...a vision of empowerment to communities that is largely illusory'. As researchers we were left with the feeling that it may have been kinder to all involved for someone to 'bite the bullet' and make a decision about the future of the community rather than to let it stagnate against a backdrop of confusion, frustration, growing stigmatization and increased deprivation.

MANAGED DECLINE, OR MANAGING UNCERTAINTY?

Between 2001 and 2009, South Bank's population declined by 20.2%, from 6,352 down to 5,070 (ONS Small Area Population Estimates). Not surprisingly, in our interviews we found that residents and some of the other local stakeholders feel that South Bank has effectively been subjected to a process of 'managed decline' for the last twenty years. Managed decline is not a new concept in the North East; during the 1950s and 1960s, mining villages in County Durham that were viewed as economically obsolete were classified as category 'D' villages. Pattinson (2004) states that, while few of the condemned villages were completely demolished, the policy created great anxiety, fear and resentment amongst the affected communities. Those emotions are evident in South Bank today.

Stakeholders and residents alike feel that the management of the regeneration process in South Bank has been weak, with too many changes of direction and a great deal of uncertainty along the way. However, there are conflicting views over what could realistically have been achieved in the area. A key local authority stakeholder commented that,

'Strategies and plans were put in place with the best intentions with the money that was available'. (Stakeholder, 2010)

Uncertainty around the future of the area has led to a sense of stagnation, which has had knock-on effects for the local housing market and resulted in the erosion of local amenities such as businesses, social facilities and the local market.

‘People will argue that they (the residents) haven’t improved their properties because they don’t know if the council are going to pull them down’.

(Stakeholder, 2010)

Some stakeholders argued that the regeneration process to date has shown little evidence of joined-up thinking and that the new development site at Low Grange is doomed to failure:

‘A new health village and schools (have been built), but (there is) no population to use them because everyone has been moved out of the area and the housing demolished’

(Stakeholder, 2010)

The local regeneration programme was dismissed by one resident as, ‘ten years of talk, lots of rubble, lots of rats, and no action’. Housing and regeneration officers took a somewhat different perspective on matters, citing the intractability of problems in South Bank, and the constraints of legal issues, delays, and the need to achieve co-operation between partners. A key restraint on progress was the need to use available funding for the proper purpose and within the right time frame, while at the same time making sure residents accepted the planned changes.

‘People don’t understand the complexity of the situation – they think it’s just a case of flattening the houses and building some new ones.’

(Stakeholder, 2010)

Ashworth (2008) sympathises with such an assessment, and states that pragmatic compromises are often a central part of the job for regeneration professionals:

‘Good front-line regeneration practitioners are often reduced to simply trying to do their best in the moment as they are bounced from one crisis to another’.

Ashworth (2008: p21)

NEW HOUSING: A LAST CHANCE FOR SOUTH BANK?

As part of the Greater Eston Strategic Master Plan (GVA Grimley, 2008), two residential development schemes are planned for the area. The first is in the very heart of the existing South Bank neighbourhood, and the second at its far eastern edge at the new Low Grange development site.

A small 'eco-homes' development is being built in the centre of South Bank, comprising 15 new homes on a site formerly occupied by street housing, plus the refurbishment of 11 existing houses. The development will be of mixed tenure, with units offered for outright sale, social rent or shared equity ownership. An 'eco-homes' development is one which meets the Code for Sustainable Homes (CLG, 2010); four units will be built to the highest level, Code 6, and the remainder will meet Code 4. The project has faced setbacks but the ground was finally broken in March 2011 and it is expected that the development will be completed within a year. This represents the first substantial new residential development to have taken place in the area for over a decade. The development of the eco-homes and some recent shop front improvements further up Normanby Road (the main arterial road through South Bank) have begun to spruce up the area and this sense of renewal has begun to filter through to some of the residents. However, the current developments may simply act as a temporary veneer masking the significant problems of dereliction and deprivation which remain in the decaying terraced streets behind the main road.

The development of eco-housing in a deprived area may be viewed as anomalous; it appears to have been a pragmatic decision driven by the fact that a funding stream to develop this type of housing was available, when other sources of funding were not. The views of existing residents on the 'eco-village' are mixed. While many welcome it because it represents the first new building in the area for a long time, they are also sceptical about whether it would be successful. Residents are concerned about the long-term cost and viability of the development:

'There are no roofs on the (street) houses, but they haven't got the money to knock them down; and then they are on about spending however many millions for the eco-village.'

(Resident, 2010)

Residents questioned whether South Bank was the right place to build such a development. Other stakeholders questioned the wisdom of building eco-homes in an area 'where you can't even get some of the residents to put rubbish in the bins'.

One stakeholder spoke of the local housing market's inability to support new development, citing the lack of previous interest from private developers in building new housing in the area. The housing market is so depressed that residential values may be lower than the costs of construction. It remains to be seen how the eco-village will fare, but it may prove difficult to buck the prevailing market trend.

Figure 2: Image showing how the completed South Bank 'eco-village' will look



(c) Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council 2010

The second, much larger, development is in neighbouring Low Grange, which has been identified as the key new housing site in the borough over the next 15 years. It is planned to provide over a thousand mixed-tenure homes; seventy percent for the open market and thirty percent for affordable housing options. Residents voiced concerns about the impact of such a large-scale residential development immediately adjacent to South Bank. Could this be an attempt at gentrification and the final nail in the coffin of the old South Bank? Would the supply of new housing facilitate the relocation of the final residents from the old houses on the west side of the main Normanby Road and the

comprehensive clearance of South Bank, thus paving the way for rumoured commercial and industrial development?

The Low Grange Farm SPD (Supplementary Planning Document) does little to calm these fears, stating that:

‘The development of the site will be central to the redevelopment of South Bank and the wider Greater Eston area in order to create a sustainable and inclusive heart to the wider community...The new [district] centre should contribute to creating a new community focus for South Bank...’

(Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, 2008, p11)

Although the local authority has been seeking to progress development on the land, the Low Grange housing project is currently stalled due to funding constraints and negative market conditions.

RETAIL-LED REGENERATION: THE ROLE OF TESCO

The Low Grange Housing Development is part of a wider development plan to create a new district centre which includes a new health village, a library, five small retail units and a substantial Tesco eco-store (including a petrol station). The Tesco store will act as an anchor for the new development; there is also scope within the planning application for a pub and community venue. Planning documents suggest the Tesco store and filling station will create 450 part and full time jobs in the area, with potentially 50–100 additional retail jobs coming from the smaller retail and leisure developments. Tesco has stated that it is committed to trying to ensure that 50% of the new jobs at the eco-store will be made available to the local long term unemployed.

This attempt at retail-led regeneration fits what Lowe (2005) describes as a regeneration model which has been developed in the last two decades with roots in the Urban Development Corporations of the 80s and 90s. Lowe (2005:450) goes on to state, policymakers desperate to encourage private sector investment in an area have ‘...found it expedient to use retail led development to ‘kick start’ urban

regeneration'. However, Instone and Roberts (2006) caution against regarding retail-led regeneration as a panacea for deprived neighbourhoods, stating that the new developments may merely displace trade and exacerbate the problems of neighbouring communities. While this may be the case for neighbouring areas in Greater Eston, Tesco could offer South Bank a lifeline. The development should provide a significant jobs boost for the area. In a deprived community like South Bank any new jobs are a reason for celebration. The full and part time, entry level jobs available at the new Tesco store are potentially more accessible for existing South Bank residents than the more highly skilled positions which have also been announced with the re-opening of the neighbouring blast furnace by SSI. Recent research from DTZ Peda states that:

'The retail sector has proved a key employment creator in areas where traditional manufacturing has declined. It is generally recognised as employing a wide range of different socioeconomic groups including low income families and minority and ethnic groups, promoting and supporting social inclusion'.

DTZ Peda (2009:15)

Equally important is the promise that the store will have a designated community champion as part of its staff team who will work with local schools, charities and the wider local community. This element of corporate social responsibility could prove vital to local community and voluntary groups in this era of substantial mainstream budget cuts. The flagship Tesco eco-store may have a significant multiplier effect for the local economy by attracting other retailers to the area, and the Section 106 agreements which come with the development will help to improve the appearance of the area through landscaping and tree planting, while potentially offering employment and skills training for local residents.

The Low Grange development could provide a new focal point for the area, but in terms its impact on the existing South Bank community and the remaining housing the jury is still out. Securing financial support for regeneration projects in the UK is becoming increasingly difficult due to extensive cuts to government funding. Competition for the remaining funds is intense, with multiple potential schemes vying for the same dwindling funding streams. This may be particularly apparent in regions or sub-

regions – like Teesside - where there are many deprived neighbourhoods bidding for limited funds. Several stakeholders cited other development sites within a few miles of the existing South Bank community that are strategically more viable, mainly because they are closer to the town of Middlesbrough (e.g. Gresham and Middlehaven). These sites, which are adjacent to the urban core and close to the University and hospital, are likely to attract students and key workers. Consequently competing areas may have stronger market demand for new residential units, thus higher property values and greater viability.

It remains to be seen whether the existing neighbourhood of South Bank will have a viable future. At the present time the odds seem to be stacked against it. Historically communities and neighbourhoods have evolved over time with new communities springing up to suit the demands of the age; however, this may be of little consolation to the small, hardy band of people who regard themselves as 'South Bankers'.

CONCLUSION

South Bank could be characterised as a place locked into a downward spiral of multiple deprivation, housing market failure, and declining population. These problems are deeply entrenched and have proved resistant to previous regeneration attempts; the relative lack of progress with the current housing renewal programme is frustrating for residents, and the area has a poor reputation. It could be argued that South Bank has no long term future; however, it does have a strong sense of community, with residents displaying a genuine commitment to the area and concerned about its future.

Potential strategies to deal with population loss as discussed in the shrinking cities literature include 'right sizing' and greening demolition areas (Schilling and Logan, 2008). While these strategies could be applied to areas like South Bank, and to an extent have been already, with demolition areas being simply grassed over, it is far from clear that the resources can be found to purchase and demolish further properties. Moreover, greening is generally viewed as a temporary measure until better times arrive. What if they never arrive? Another strategy which appears to be being employed is to slowly

geographically relocate areas like South Bank to neighbouring areas which do not share the stigma of the old community (Low Grange Farm in this case). There are existing examples of this 'positive gentrification' (Cameron, 2003) approach in the North East. For instance, the once notorious Cruddas Park estate in the West End of Newcastle is experiencing a very substantial change as it becomes 'Riverside Dene'.

Wider social issues face deprived communities like South Bank. Lack of employment opportunities and the state of the wider economy are significant, but in South Bank there are emerging employment opportunities. Perhaps, rather than a lack of jobs, the real issues may be around aspirations, confidence and the debilitating effect of living in a community which has an inescapable reputation; a reputation which may create a self fulfilling prophecy, where generations of young people and working age adults lack belief and perceive themselves as useless and destined to lead a life on the margins, depending on the state or the grey economy for their survival.

The Coalition government appears to lack a coherent vision for deprived communities but early signs suggest the localism and Big Society agendas appears to advocate self help and self sufficiency. It remains to be seen what will happen in poorly connected communities where the confidence, connections and skills to solve your own problems are in very limited supply.

About the research

The research which forms the basis of this paper was a scoping study for a planned 25 year longitudinal study which will investigate the impact of the Greater Eston Regeneration Masterplan on South Bank residents' quality of life. All opinions outlined in this paper represent the views of the research team and in no way represent the position of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council.

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